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Summary of Talk,
CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS "GET THRU" TO PEOPLE:
(1002-2)

We're all deeply involved every day with practicing the art of clear communications. In fact it's probably the most important task we face. You're communicating from the day you're born and cry out to be fed to writing your will on perhaps the day you die.

Yet how our communications can go haywire at times. Here's an extreme example, from World War II, with world-wide effects (quoted from Stuart Chase's book, "The Power of Words"):

"A Japanese word, mokusatsu, may have changed all our lives. It has two meanings: (1) to ignore, (2) to refrain from comment. The release of a press statement using the second meaning in July of 1945 might have ended the war then. The Emperor was ready to end it, and had the power to do so. The cabinet was preparing to accede to the Potsdam ultimatum of the Allies--surrender or be crushed--but wanted a little more time to discuss the terms. A press release was prepared announcing a policy of mokusatsu, with the no comment implication. But it got on the foreign wires with the ignore implication through a mix-up in translation. 'The cabinet ignores the demand to surrender.'"

"To recall the release would have entailed an unthinkable loss of face. Had the intended meaning been publicized, the cabinet might have backed up the Emperor's decision to surrender. In which event, there might have been no atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, no Russian armies in Manchuria, no Korean war to follow. The lives of tens of thousands of Japanese and American boys might have been saved. One word, misinterpreted."

Other examples: CPA price regulation, North Dakota's "Northern Pig from Birth to Market" compared with Wisconsin's bulletin on brucellosis, comments from University of Wisconsin M. S. thesis on "Weaknesses in Technical Writing," and story about poorly educated plumber who used hydrochloric acid to clean out clogged pipes until told: "Don't use hydrochloric acid. It eats hell out of the pipes!" Or the story about the city fellow who saw a farmer butchering a hog and asked him, "Is that for home consumption?" "Nope," the farmer replied, "I'm gonna eat him."

Thirdly, three key requirements for clear communications are (1) sound planning, (2) short, clear, interesting copy and (3) first-rate visuals. Of course, other factors can hinder our efforts. But that's all the more reason for following these three principles. Remember the white triangle with red dots on the points. When you whirl it, the red dots look like a red circle. Sound planning, clear copy and A-1 visuals depend on each other just like that. You need all three for the best publication.

Finally, how to prevent your communications from going haywire? Simply by applying these three principles fully. That's perhaps 90 % of the answer. The Flesch and other readability formulas give us an objective measure of readability. They're an excellent guide to readability, but need, content,

organization, layout and other factors affect the total impression on your reader also. Readable copy really draws the readers though. Remember the Wisconsin gardening publication written at college, 9th grade and 6th grade levels. They couldn't keep the 6th grade version in print. Adults kept grabbing it up, even though it was meant for young teen-agers as a 4-H manual.





